

Forcing Pass Auctions

By Neil Kimelman

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Introduction

Bidding, as we know, can be very competitive. This occurs even when our side has most of the high card strength. The vulnerability, form of scoring, and distribution all contribute to the opponents being able to bid at the four, five, and six levels, making our lives difficult. Should we bid on? How high? Should we double? The Forcing Pass Principle is one of our main tools in our bidding toolbox to help our partnership define our hands, and decide what is best.

Many newer players may be unfamiliar with the Principles of Forcing Pass auctions. Even for those that are, this is an area that is well worth reviewing with your partner(s). Many experienced players, even world class players, have gone wrong on specific hands. So the purpose of this article is to define the term "Forcing Pass", when it is applicable, what bids mean, and to offer my own thoughts on the subject. Naturally I will include example hands.

I. Forcing Pass Definition

When your partnership has made a bid that has created a game forcing auction, the opponents cannot play a contract undoubled.

This is a simple definition and I will start with a simple hand.

Example 1:

West	North	East	South
--	--	Pass	1 Spade
Pass	2 Heart	5 Diamond	?

Assuming that 2♥ is game forcing then this becomes a forcing pass situation. If South passes 5♦, North cannot.

II. When else does a Forcing Pass situation occur?

i) Besides hands where the partnership is in a game forcing auction, forcing pass also applies when one hand opens and the other hand shows at least invitational values.

Example 2:

West	North	East	South
--	--	Pass	1 Spade
Pass	3 Diamond ¹	5 Diamond	?

¹Four card limit raise in spades.

This is a Forcing Pass situation.

ii) When your partnership bids game, and you are vulnerable versus nonvulnerable opponents.

Example 3, N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
--	--	Pass	1 Spade
2 Heart	2 Spade	4 Heart	4 Spade
5 Heart	?		

My partners and I play this is a forcing pass situation. *At any other vulnerability it is not.* This to me is a reasonable treatment, but may not be universal. The logic behind this agreement is that we should have extra values to bid game with a risk of being doubled for -200, -500 or more, versus 420 for the opponents.

iii) When the opponents preempt and your partnership bids game.

Example 4, none - vul:

West	North	East	South
--	--	Pass	1 Heart
3 Spade	4 Heart	4 Spade	Pass
?			

This is a forcing pass auction. This would be true even if east were not a passed hand.

III. What do bids mean in a Forcing Pass situation?

Each bid has a specific meaning. Let's look at Example 1 again:

West	North	East	South
--	--	Pass	1 Spade
Pass	2 Heart	5 Diamond	?

1. Double – This means, 'Based on the information I have available I think we should defend 5♦.' It implies one or more of the following:

1. A doubleton diamond.
2. No fit for hearts.
3. Minimum values.

A typical hand for the double: ♠KQ543 ♥105 ♦105 ♣AKJ9

2. 5♥ - This means, 'I have an offensive type hand and think we have a good chance to make 5♥, and I do not want to defend against 5♦'. It often shows good distribution and short diamonds. A possible holding: ♠AQ10872 ♥A853 ♦2 ♣32.

3. Pass – Pass has two likely meanings:

The most common meaning is, 'I will leave the a) decision up to you – I can go either way.' Whatever partner chooses you would pass. Something like: ♠AJ10862 ♥Q3 ♦2 ♣AJ42

The other meaning is: 'I have a very good hand for b) my last bid, definitely want to bid on, and have some slam interest.' If you have this type of hand you will pull partner's double and raise if partner

bids. For example: ♠AK1082 ♥Q53 ♦2 ♣KQ42. With this hand you would bid 5♥ if partner doubles 5♦, and bid 6♥ if partner bids 5♥.

Pass usually denies exactly a doubleton diamond; otherwise a double would be the expected bid. Although, if you have a good hand such as ♠AKJ82 ♥AJ2 ♦54 ♣KQ4 a pass would be a very reasonable exception to this guideline.

4. Partner's suit – The normal meaning of such a bid is: 'I want to bid on and suggest your first suit as trump. I don't promise any extra values.' Here is an example auction:

Example 5, none vulnerable, as South you hold: ♠K1082 ♥K53 ♦KQ742 ♣2

West	North	East	South
--	1 Diamond	Pass	1 Spade
2 Club	2 Spade	Pass	4 Spade
Pass	Pass	5 Club	5 Diamond

As suggested by this example, bidding 5♦ implies more length and sometimes strength in diamonds. This is often important when the bidding suggests that bad breaks are very possible.

5. New suit – Example 6; N-S vulnerable:

West	North	East	South
--	--	Pass	1 Heart
3 Spade	4 Heart	4 Spade	5 Club

There are three reasonable ways to play this bid:

1'I am trying for slam and have a club control.

2'I am trying for slam and have a club suit.' 'I have a club suit and am trying to help you decide

3. what to do should the opponents bid 5♠.' I have a strong preference for the 3rd option, as it has the highest frequency of occurrence. If I have one of the first two hands I can pass and then bid 5♣ if partner doubles 4♠.

IV. What are the pitfalls of Forcing Pass auctions?

This might sound funny, but don't forget to look at the auction and your hand before making a decision. Here is an example to illustrate this point:

Example 7 > E-W vulnerable; as south you hold: ♠ AQ982 ♥KJ105 ♦62 ♣K5

West	North	East	South
--	--	Pass	1 Spade
2 NT	3 Club ¹	3 Diamond	4 Spade
5 Diamond	Pass	Pass	?

¹Limit raise (or better) in spades.

On this auction I would bid on. I am not sure I can even beat 5♦. The opponents are vulnerable. How much defence do you have? Not much. Partner does not promise the world's fair for the limit raise. This could easily be the hand:

	♠ K J 10 4 ♥ A 9 8 7 3 ♦ 8 ♣ 9 8 7	
♠ 5 3 ♥ Void ♦ K Q 10 9 5 3 ♣ A Q 10 4 2		♠ 7 6 ♥ Q 6 4 2 ♦ A 7 5 4 ♣ J 6 3
	♠ A Q 9 8 2 ♥ K J 10 5 ♦ 6 2 ♣ K 5	

To emphasize this point here is an actual hand from the Round Robin of the 2010 CNTC:

	♠ J 8 7 6 5 ♥ K J 9 7 4 2 ♦ A J ♣ Void	
♠ 4 3 2 ♥ A ♦ K Q 10 9 5 3 ♣ A 10 5 4		♠ Void ♥ Q 10 6 ♦ 9 7 5 4 ♣ K Q 9 8 6 3
	♠ A K Q 10 9 ♥ 8 5 3 ♦ 10 2 ♣ J 7 2	

At one table that I am aware of the bidding went:

W	N	E	S
--	1 Heart	3 Club	4 Heart
5 Club	Pass	Pass	X
All Pass			

Despite N-S being in a forcing pass situation the opponents are cold for 6♣!! South would have been better advised to bid 3♣, but that subject is for a future article! I encourage you to read more on the Forcing Pass. There are excellent books available by Edwin Kantar and others.